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SAVE OUR SCHOOLS

President Reagan has a peachy solution for saving the public schools: pray in the public schools and give the money to the private schools.

Long before last week's report by a national commission warned that we are about to wreck the nation by ignoring its education, it was becoming a hot issue in California. That was because Bill Honig, in his successful campaign for State Superintendent of Public Instruction, had raised the same basic points and recommendations.

About five years ago, the JCRC, with the help of the JCF Endowment Fund, surveyed what was happening in this area's public schools. We documented the deterioration of serious educational standards. One startling example was "Walking Around Town" as a substitute for a mandated American history course in high school. This Jewish community then began to press for higher standards around the area, Bill Honig being one of the people involved.

And, indeed, the pendulum began to swing slowly in the other direction (not, of course, just because of the Jewish community's efforts). But the movement was too slow, and collided with a new economic crunch. It has become clear that, if the public schools do not take a definitive turn in *this* year and next, they may become virtually irreparable.

Money alone will not solve the problems. But some of the problems cannot be solved without more money. Curricular standards and tests have to be up-graded. Teachers have to be more stringently evaluated. Discipline has to be tightened. All that can be done on paper without money -- but it will not mean much unless the teacher corps is also up-graded and re-motivated. The entry salaries will no longer attract many teachers of quality. Merit pay is needed. More school time has to be paid for.

President Reagan suggests that we can address the problem by allowing prayer in the schools, and by providing tuition tax credits for attendance at private schools. The Jewish community has long opposed prayers in the public schools, because that is the road to second-class citizenship for Jews; but in any case, that will not solve the problem of school disrepair. And tuition tax credits will put another nail in the coffin which is being constructed for public schools.

The common public school system has been a foundation of the kind of democratic system in which Jews can flourish in freedom. To put it narrowly, the fact is that the better educated a group is, the more of its members will be opposed to anti-semitism -- and indeed, supportive of Israel. If we allow the population to become educationally splintered; and if we allow the public schools to become a low-quality reservoir for the least advantaged -- then we are building trouble for the country in general, and for the Jews in particular.

Perhaps you will want to write the President, and your Congressman, indicating that prayers in the schools are objectionable, and tuition tax credits counter-indicated. And perhaps you will want to write your state legislators, now considering education proposals, suggesting that school reforms are needed this year; and that you as a taxpayer are willing to help pay for such reforms if they are really mandated.